Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XIX

Friedrick Holekamp
Kerr-Kendall Counties

By MYRTLE MURRAY

District Agent, Extension Service
College Station, Texas

EDITOR'S NOTE.—This series began with the January issue of 1938. In her dedication, Miss Murray stated, "I am firmly convinced that the conquest of Southwest Texas was not wholly made with the accompaniment of flaunting banners and martial music but in the every day lives of those citizens who lived there after the (Civil) war." It is this "home life" she so ably portrays. The setting is Miss Murray's "District" of 24 counties, Atascosa, Bandera, Bee, Bexar, Caldwell, Calhoun, Comal, DeWitt, Edwards, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Jackson, Karnes, Kendall, Kerr, Kinney, Lavaca, Medina, Real, Refugio, Uvalde, Victoria and Wilson.

Since the beginning of this series of family sketches many commendatory expressions have been received. Of the magazine in general and the "Home Life" stories in particular, Dan D. Casement, Manhattan, Kansas, wrote on May 19, 1939: "The material you present has real value and is for the most part a distinct contribution to literature and history. Your sketches of the early pioneer women are particularly valuable."

The 18 chapters carried in "The Cattleman" were, in order:

Elijah Ray, Bee county. Joel D. Fenley, Uvalde county. Robert Parkinson Wilkinson, Goliad county. Orlanda Thallman, Bandera county. Joseph H. Polley, Wilson county. Josiah Claiborne Traylor, Calhoun-Jackson counties. James Rumsey Skiles, Karnes county. Henrich Rothe, Medina county. Isaac Newton Mitchell, Jackson county. John Campbell, Atascosa county. John Leakey, Real county. Casper Real, Kerr county. Andrew Lee Brock, Caldwell county. John Alexander Clark, Lavaca county. Peter Fagan, Refugio county. George Lord, DeWitt county. David Karbach, Comal county. Martin de Leon, Victoria county.

FRIEDRICK Holekamp, born in Hanover, Germany, in 1812, had received superior advantages for that day and time. He graduated from the University: could speak German, French and English fluently, and could read Latin and Greek. He was an accomplished musician. He was so fond of music that he probably would have been happier if he could have devoted his time to that profession. But his father, Daniel Holekamp, a builder and contractor, considered music as a cultural art that should contribute to the richness of life, not as a means of making a living. He made his son promise that he would never accept money for music.

So Friedrick, sometimes called George, engaged in farming and the manufacture of brick. Since all German boys had to learn a trade he chose brick-making. But, he was never wholly satisfied with either.

At a little community gathering where he was playing the piano, he asked for someone to sing. Bettie Wilhelmine Appenthern was mentioned.

"But I was a timid and a very foolish girl," she laughingly recalled in telling the story in later years, "so I left the room."

After much persuasion she returned and did sing. She had a beautiful voice.

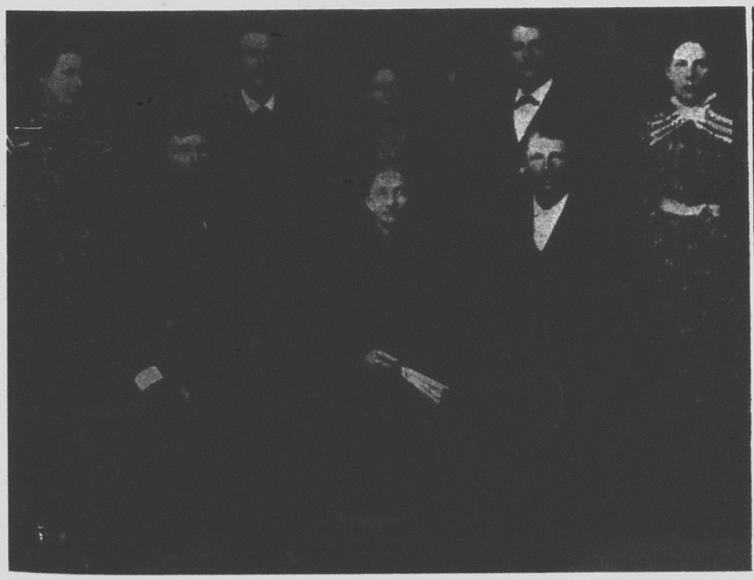
"I always kept her in mind after hearing her sing," declared Friedrick Holekamp.

Betty Wilhelmine Appenthern was the daughter of Henry Christian Appenthern, a member of the household of King Ernest August, then the King of Hanover, holding the position of Ministerial Accountant until his death. She had been educated with the King's daughters, attending a school where she was taught French and fine manners. She could sing well and was educated to be a governess. But after she became engaged to Friedrick Holekamp, and expected to live on a farm, she went to a big estate and worked with the girls there to learn the ways of housekeeping so she would know how to manage work on a farm. In those days the German boys and girls were taught a trade. For the girls of her class a trade was that of a governess, or teaching fine manners, usually to the children of the King's court or those of very wealthy families. All girls could not get married, and those who did not eventually went to live at homes for unmarried women.

Even before their marriage in March, 1844, they were interested in Texas. They read with much interest Prince Carl Solms' glowing account of the opportunities for German colonists in Texas, especially for farmers. Next to music Friedrick Holekamp probably loved farming best. This he thought, was an opportunity to become "a gentleman farmer," where he could direct the work on a big scale; live comfortably; he could hunt, and have much time to pursue cultural interests so vital to both of them. They could live a grand, free life in a country of great scenic beauty.

Having been married so short a time, they did not have much household baggage. But they brought farm implements, household and other equipment, as suggested by Prince Solms. Their most prized possessions were the books they were to bring over. These were packed carefully and they hoped at least one musical instrument could be bought soon after they got settled in their new home.

They were among the 228 passengers who boarded the *Joharm Dethard*, a sail ship, in the fall of 1844. After a slow, tedious voyage, they landed in Galveston, November 24, 1844. There they transferred to a smaller ship for In-



LEFT—Mrs. Friedrick Holekamp (nee Bettie Wilhelmine Appenthern) and her children. Standing, left to right, are Johanna (Mrs. F. J. Hamer), Ernest, Dora (Mrs. Paul Karger), Daniell, and Bettie (Mrs. Henry Schmelter). Seated, in same order, Julius, Mrs. Friedrick Holekamp, and George. Julius is said to have looked a good deal like the father who was killed during the Civil War.

RIGHT—The first home of George Holekamp, built in November, 1869. It was to this home that he brought his bride, nee Miss Fanny Roggenbucke, on May 22, 1871. Their daughter, Miss Ida Holekamp, was born here, February 22, 1872.

dianola. Although the distance was short in comparison with the trip across the Atlantic, it proved to be much harder. A heavy storm blew the ship back towards Mexico; food and water became scarce. The captain insisted that the wind was blowing them the wrong way. The men on board finally decided that the trouble was with the captain; that he was purposely delaying their arrival in Indianola with the hope of collecting more money from them. The men got together and told him he had to bring the ship into Indianola. Then after a prolonged trip and much suffering they landed there.

After the usual delay at Indianola, for the purpose of opening the big chests—which contained personal clothing and household linen—so the articles could be sunned and dried; the farming implements and other equipment could be cleaned in order to prevent rust from forming; they started overland in a caravan of ox-drawn carts to New Braunfels. They moved slowly through heavy rains, muddy roads and cold weather. When they finally arrived on the banks of the Guadalupe, just across which lay the sites of their future homes—their "Promised Land"—it was on such a rampage that it was too dangerous to cross. There they camped and waited for some time.

Leads Way Across Guadalupe.

Finally the waters subsided and it was safe for the immigrants to cross. The camp buzzed happily. At last the ox-drawn wagons were packed and ready to move forward. There were horses for some to ride. The others would ride across in the already heavily loaded wagons and carts. But the big question was who would go first?

Mrs. Holekamp manifested her courage by offering to ride across first on horseback. Prince Carl Solms of Braunfels, also offered to ride. Later it was declared by some that Mrs. Holekamp offered to ride over first because she would not be outdone by the Prince. Others declared the Prince would not be outdone by a woman. Be this as it may, the Prince and Mrs. Holekamp led the way across the Guadalupe, their horses side by side, and the caravan of carts and wagons slowly following.

While Mrs. Holekamp had won distinction by being the first of the immigrants to cross the Guadalupe, Mr. Holekamp was among the first of the colonists to receive the headright of land allotted him by the colony on March 21, 1845. It was in Kerr county, which was a long way off at that time.

They built a crude cabin on the lot in New Braunfels which was allotted Mr. Holekamp by the colony, and also cultivated the 10-acre plot allotted him near by. Each took an active part in the affairs of the community. They especially enjoyed the singings, and dances on Saturday nights at the dance hall—*lutige strumpf*.

Mrs. Holekamp won another distinction during this time by making the first Texas flag that floated to the breezes of the little town of New Braunfels. It was made from the cloth of various old garments of suitable colors, gathered from men's shirts and women's dresses. It bore the *lone star* in the blue field, and was about two yards long and of proproportionate width. Its unfurling on the public square gave offense to Prince Solms, the then governor and dictator of the colony, indicating as it did the appreciation of the fact by the immigrants that they had found a home in a free and independent country.

But Mr. Holekamp was not satisfied. Instead of the big farming operations on the large estates he had expected to direct, only limited operations with the crudest equipment were possible. His dream of long, happy evenings spent before a warm crackling fire, reading with Mrs. Holekamp, or he playing a musical instrument (which they had not been able to buy) while she sang, was an impossibility. He returned from work too tired for anything except to eat the simple supper which Mrs. Holekamp prepared, and go to bed on bumpy shuck-filled mattresses. Mrs. Holekamp, too, was tired out from doing the unaccustomed heavy work.

They lived in New Braunfels two years, then moved to Fredericksburg, where he helped lay out lots and made bricks for the new colony there. But that was still a pioneer life, so after two years they moved to Sisterdale, a German colony with aims of which he was sympathetic.

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They lived there three years and Mr. Holekamp was some better satisfied. He enjoyed the social intercourse with those cultured colonists. But, that, too, was still a pioneer life. While they were not in danger of being attacked, the Indians made frequent raids to secure food. Mrs. Holekamp had become an expert marksman, and usually kept a pistol close at hand. She could kill a deer or panther as quickly as the men. One day while she was churning, an Indian came into the kitchen and took off her bright colored table cloth, and gathered up some bright material from which she had planned to make a dress, and walked off with it.

After having lived there for three years they moved to a farm near San Antonio, thinking it might be healthier. But shortly after that time Mr. Holekamp came to Comfort with Ernest Altgelt who had charge of surveying and laying out the town of Comfort. Mr. Holekamp did much of the surveying under Mr. Altgelt's direction. This town was near his grant of land and he seemed to feel that at last he was located. He was the first to build his block house after the town was laid out, and Mrs. Holekamp and the children moved in immediately. Here they could have protection from the Indians whose raids were becoming more frequent, and yet cultivate their farm which was just across the county line in Kerr county, where Kurt Holekamp now lives.

He had acquired some cattle and raised grain. The plowing was done with oxen.

Liked New House.

During all this time Mrs. Holekamp had cheerfully adopted herself to pioneering. She was an excellent manager. Each child had his job and was expected to do his share of the work. Although she did her own washing, ironing, churning and sewing, Mrs. Holekamp managed to find time to enjoy her family. She loved her new log house. Its one big room and smaller rooms with small windows were comfortably furnished with hickory chairs of rawhide bottom, home-made beds of cypress with hand-hewn slats and corn-husk mattresses. They enjoyed sitting around the hearth at night, reading, telling the children stories of their early life in Germany, of crossing the Atlantic in a sail boat and of their journey from Indianola to New Braunfels. Frequently they sang together. And while Mr. Holekamp never realized his great ambition to own an instrument, occasionally some one would bring one to the community. He would always be asked to play which was a great occasion for him. He was leader of the German Singing Society *Liedertafel*. Mr. Holekamp had received some training in medicine so Mrs. Holekamp felt that she had much better care when her babies were born than the other pioneer mothers.

They were doing well when the Civil War came on. Mr. Holekamp enlisted almost at once with the hope that his boys would not have to go. He entered the Confederate Army as a surgeon. The wife, who as a girl had been educated with the King's daughters, and was later trained to teach the children of the King's court French and fine manners, remained at home with her children, George, Johanna, Julius, Daniell, Dora and Ernest. George, 16, was small in stature and Julius was tall for his age. But both had been taught to assume responsibility. George, as the older, naturally took the lead. It was he who went after the doctor when the youngest child, Bettie, was born, just a few weeks after the father entered the army. Dora, the 8-year-old daughter, gave the baby sister her first bath. George had carried the U. S. mail from Comfort to Sisterdale for his father when he was only 9 years old. He was sent on all kinds of errands overland and on foot most of the time. Later he hauled freight. The oxen had to be searched for every time they were needed. The boys usually did that.

The four years of the Civil War were so fraught with danger and hardships that many brave hearts quailed. But Mrs. Holekamp surmounted each difficulty with courageous cheerfulness. The family washing was done in the near

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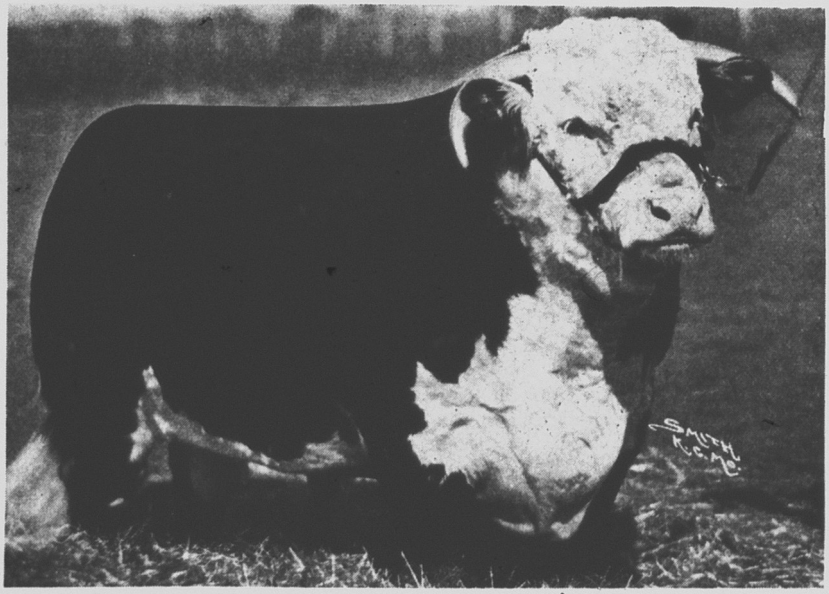

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by streams. She and the children carried the bundles of clothes on their heads to the water and back to the house. Water for household use was carried up hill—two cans on a shoulder yoke. Baths were taken in a wash tub on Saturday night. She made soap from home-made lye and tallow. Before and after the War material for clothes could be bought at the store in Comfort, but during the war sometimes materials were not so plentiful. Unbleached domestic was dyed with hand-brewed dyes and made into dresses. Slat bonnets and corn-husk hats were made. The boys wore six-shooters attached to leather belts around their waists over their suits of hickory shirts and jeans trousers, or buckskin pants. Every garment was made by Mrs. Holekamp with the help of the girls. They also knitted their socks and stockings. Much of the knitting was done by the light from grease lamps and tallow candles. These, too, were home made.

Mr. Holekamp Killed in Battle.

The food was very simple consisting mainly of coarse corn and wheat bread, wild game and fish. The boys were good hunters. Those were bleak days for the Holekamp family. Then came the sad news that Mr. Holekamp, the father and husband, had been killed in battle and was buried in an unidentified grave.

This sorrow and the added responsibility seemed to be a challenge for Mrs. Holekamp to carry out the plans she and her husband had made. She sewed for other people, took in washing and ironing and taught her children that to do any honest work was no disgrace.

In order for her own children to go to school, she boarded other children. Among those who boarded with her were Gus and Louis Schreiner, Charles Real and Charles F. Ganahl, the son of Bettie's god-mother. He did not like school and one time he tried to jump out of the window and run away, but Mrs. Holekamp made him come back.

Each member of the family worked. The boys hired out at first for their board. The first money George and Julius earned was fifty cents each for one day's work which they proudly brought home to their mother. While they could usually buy the necessary supplies from a store in Comfort, sometimes the ox-drawn freighted wagon would be delayed for weeks because of high water. Then George and Julius would walk to Fredericksburg, a distance of some 20 miles. During one of these trips George heard about a man who could teach English. While he spoke a little English he thought he needed to speak it better. So he secured a job of waiting on the tables in a cafe in Fredericksburg to pay for his room and board in order that he might learn to speak better English from the Irish school teacher. The family declared that was why he always spoke it with a brogue.

Christmas was a great occasion. Ash or cedar trees were at first used for Christmas trees. Later cherry laurel was used. They were trimmed with cookies decorated with colored icing. Egg shells were colored with *gold schaun*, an imitation of gold, and apples too, if they could get them. When the home-made gifts, including balls and rag dolls, and sometimes only a tin cup, were placed on the tree, the children thought it was lovely.

They looked forward to the celebrations at Christmas and Fourth of July. Occasionally there were dances in between these occasions. In the summer they

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loved to dance out-of-doors on the grass: the Virginia Reel, polonaise, quadrille and skipping games, while the polka, mazurka, schottisch, galop and waltzes were usually danced in-doors. The furniture was moved out to make room. Then someone would play on a comb or harmonica, and sometimes on an accordian. Sometimes they danced while some whistled, or to singing while others clapped their hands. Forgotten were the cares and hardships; both the old and young danced with a spontaneous abandonment that was socially and spiritually satisfying.

They usually walked everywhere since there were few roads. They cut across the hills or river bottoms, guided by the stars. Mrs. Holekamp had told them the stories of many of the stars. During these walks they had opportunity to study them, and also the lovely shrubs of the country.

Occasionally George would take one of the children with him on a business trip to San Antonio. Those trips made a lasting impression on the child who was fortunate enough to get to go. Ernest, the youngest son, never forgot his first trip there in 1867. He was a barefoot, eight-year-old boy when he drove along Commerce Street with his brother, George, in a wagon, drawn by five yoke of oxen, loaded with cypress shingles, to be delivered at Steve's Lumber Yard, which was then on the corner of Alamo Plaza and Blum Street, the present site of Joske's. The stores filled with goods fascinated him. He returned to San Antonio seven years later and became a clerk in a general merchandise store.

George was the first one to marry. He married Fanny Roggenbucke, also a native of Germany. They had a very quiet wedding in her mother's home in May, 1871. Since they were to start out early the next morning to their one-room log cabin on their farm on Cypress Creek, it was decided for him to spend the night at his mother's home in order to bring the wagon over early the next morning for his bride and her things which she would have packed and ready. While he was walking home, he met a friend who told him to get back to Fanny's home quick for they were going to *charivari* them. This was a custom and an honor bestowed upon a popular young couple on their wedding night, or soon after. Their wedding had been very quiet with only members of the families and a few close friends attending because they were too poor to have any other kind. George hardly reached Fanny's home before the merry-makers burst forth with every conceivable noise. After singing and dancing around the house, they were invited in, and the bride's parents served wine, after which the young folks danced nearly all night.

Oldest Son Helped.

Although George had married, he still continued to help his mother with the rearing of the younger children. Some of them felt that he was more nearly a father than a brother.

While Mrs. Holekamp still managed her home, she encouraged the children to seek the occupation in which they were most interested.

George was a born farmer and ranchman. He was gradually accumulating more land and more cattle of his own while helping his mother with the management of her business. He bought the Franz Weiss cattle brand, and had it registered in several counties and soon became known far and wide. Julius, too, enjoyed farming and ranching.

Daniell was a natural salesman. He was working in the Schreiner's store in Kerrville when an epidemic of smallpox spread over the entire country. He came home to spend Saturday night and Sunday and unwittingly handed out smallpox to each member of the family. While there he broke out.

Mrs. Holekamp sent the children out to the farm to stay with George and Fanny, excepting Julius who refused to leave her and Daniell. Neighbors prepared their meals and brought the food half way across the road during the time she nursed her sons. She had a light case herself. Julius had a very severe case, even breaking out in his throat and nose. Mrs. Holekamp kept his hands tied so that he could not scratch the sores and she treated each infection with a feather dipped in melted, unsalted butter. But it was a long hard siege, and it was a happy day when the children were finally permitted to come home. Mrs. Holekamp was so glad when she saw them, she cried. She expressed her intellectual hunger when she said to one of the girls, "I wish you could have been here; you could have read to me."

Mrs. Holekamp was ever ready to nurse the sick in the community. The neighbors always regretted that they could not help her at the time.

Gradually her children grew up, married, moved into homes of their own and became influential citizens. She con-

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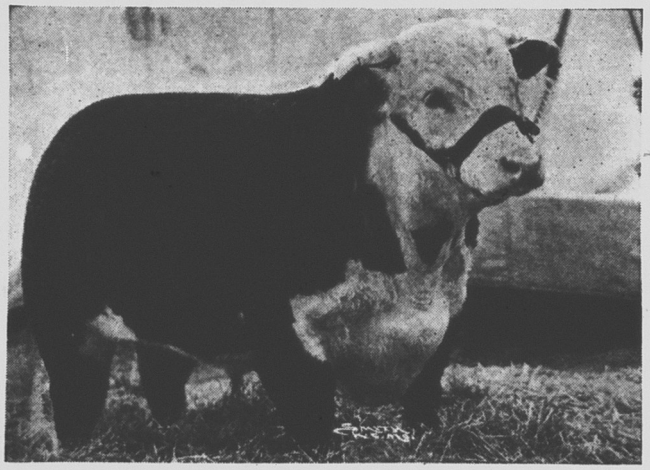

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tinued to live in her old home. As she became more prosperous, conveniences were added. She welcomed the opportunity to do hand work and to read. She knitted gloves, mittens, stockings, socks, balls, and did beautiful embroidery. She lead a reading club and helped establish a magazine exchange. Each family paid subscriptions while Mrs. Brinkman kept and exchanged the magazines for the group, or club.

Her youngest daughter, Bettie, was active in amateur dramatics as a young girl. After she became a widow, Mrs. Schmelter and her two daughters lived with Mrs. Holekamp. Mrs. Schmelter was active in directing local plays. She also played the guitar and the German zither. Her mother was her chief adviser.

Mrs. Holekamp was a great favorite with her grandchildren. They were always glad to see her come for a visit. She told them interesting stories and taught them little verses.

Instead of training the children of the King's Court in Hanover, Germany, fine manners, she assisted in training her grandchildren. From her stories, they developed an appreciation of good literature, music, and some of the facts of life. They were told that the stork brought babies, but according to the fairy stories, children were born. They loved to hear her sing. Both her children's and her grandchildren's favorite song that she sang were *Erl Koenig*, or "Earle King" which she sang in German, and "Sleep Baby, Sleep."

Hurt in First Train Ride.

She watched with interest each progressive development of the country, and was, perhaps, as happy as any one in Comfort when the first train puffed into that city. Her daughter, Mrs. Bettie Schmelter, persuaded her to go on the train with her to San Antonio. On the return trip, while coming over the Spanish Pass, the train ran over a cow, and the passenger coach was hurled down an embankment. Mrs. Holekamp was pinned between the seats and nearly scalped. Mrs. Schmelter tied the scalp down tightly with her handkerchief so the skin would not be pulled off completely by her long, heavy hair. They were finally brought into Comfort on the locomotive. She did not receive treatment until the next morning. She had no anaesthetic, but her sons held her hands during that painful ordeal.

Mrs. Holekamp died in 1902, forty years after her husband's death.

When I think of Mrs. Holekamp as a pioneer home-maker, I am reminded of the inscription on the corner stone of the Home Economics building of the State University of Austin, which is as follows:

"To the pioneer women of Texas who amid hardships and danger preserved in their family life their ancestral culture, broadened it through their experiences, and left it as a priceless heritage to the succeeding generation, this building is dedicated."

The Holekamp children were: George, married Fanny V. Roggenbuck, lived in Kerr county; Julius, married Susan Fricke at Roundtop, lived in Kerr county; Daniell, influential business man at Comfort, married Helene Faltin who died, and he later married Frances Wiedenfeld of Comfort; Dora, married Paul Karger, a farmer; Johanna, married F. J. Hamer who was in business in Kerrville; Ernest, merchant of Junction, married Dora Muegge of San Antonio; Bettie, married Henry Schmelter of Comfort.

Only two of the children are living now, Ernest Holekamp of Junction, and Mrs. Bettie Schmelter of Comfort.

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